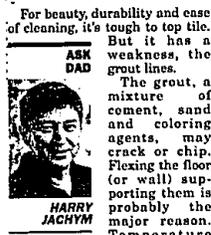


Maintain grout for lovely tiles



For beauty, durability and ease of cleaning, it's tough to top tile. But it has a weakness, the grout lines. The grout, a mixture of cement, sand and coloring agents, may crack or chip. Flexing the floor (or wall) supporting them is probably the major reason. Temperature changes, an object striking them or even poor installation also can cause problems.

It's important to repair the damaged grout as soon as possible. If left unchecked, moisture can escalate a small job into a full-blown, tear out and replacement of the entire floor, wall or countertop.

Getting to it

Remove as much of the damaged grout as possible using a tool called a grout saw. (It may also be called a grout rake or

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simply a grout-removing tool). These are inexpensive and available where tile is sold. Try to remove the grout down to the base material. Eye protection is a good idea for this part. Vacuum the grout chips and dust.

If you are lucky, there will be a partial bag of dry grout left from the original application. If not, take a few larger pieces of the broken grout to help match the existing color with you when purchasing new grout. It may be necessary to mix two or more colors to obtain a good match.

Mix a small sample and let it dry for several days for comparison. Mix the dry grout with a latex additive rather than water. This additive increases the bond strength and makes the grout a bit more flexible.

Dampen the area and work the grout in the space between the tiles. As the grout begins to set, (about ten minutes or so) match the shape with the surrounding area using your finger or a sponge. I suggest waterproof gloves if you have sensitive skin or the grout has deep color.

When to use caulk

If the broken grout occurred near dissimilar material such as a door threshold or shower base it will likely reoccur. This is caused by the different expansion and contraction rates of the material. It's best to use a caulk instead of grout to repair these areas. Caulks are available in a wide range of colors that will closely resemble the grout. Seal the grout after the drying time specified by the sealer manufacturer. Broken tiles need to be

replaced. Remove the grout around the tile (using the grout saw). Then, with an electric drill and a masonry bit, drill several holes in the tile. Avoid drilling through the tile into the base material. Use a hammer to break up the old tile. Hold a rag over the tile to prevent splatter and use care not to damage the base material. Scrape away as much of the old adhesive as possible. Glue the new tile in place and re-grout as above.

Harry Jachym, a licensed builder, teaches construction trades to high school students and is the general contractor for Habitat for Humanity, Western Wayne County. Since we all seem to ask our fathers for repair or remodeling advice, Jachym writes "Ask Dad," a column on home issues ranging from repairs and maintenance to building and remodeling projects. He is a Plymouth resident. Send any questions or comments to Harry at askdad@comcast.net or in care of Susan Steinmuller, 805 East Maple, Birmingham, 48009.

GARDENING CALENDAR

Send items for consideration in the Gardening Calendar to Keely Kalecki Wygonik, Assistant Managing Editor Features, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 35251 Schoolcraft, MI 48150, e-mail kwygonik@obs.com

GARDENING CLUBS

Redford Club: Meets 7 p.m. on the first Monday of the month at the Redford Community Center on Capital in the library. Share information with fellow gardeners, attend workshops and programs offered through the Federated Garden Clubs of Michigan which are provided for members. Call Sandy (313) 937-4465 for club and membership information.

African Violet Society: is having its annual spring display and sale 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday, March 30 and 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday, March 31 at Matthaei Botanical Gardens, 1800 Dixboro Road, Ann Arbor. No admission charge.

Community House Garden Club: At 7 p.m. on Monday, March 11, the Community House Garden Club from Birmingham presents "Creative Container Gardening," given by George Pappadella, owner of Tilly's Greenhouse in Troy. Learn how to use both classic and new plants to create great container gardens. Includes annuals, perennials, tropicals, grasses, and even woody plants. Cost is \$5 for guests. For more information, call Pat Jerzy at the Community House at (248) 644-5532.

The Michigan Cactus and Succulent Society: The Michigan Cactus and Succulent Society will meet at 2 p.m. Sunday, March 10, at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, 814 North Campbell, Royal Oak. The topic is "How to Grow Astrophorum and Aloe Plants." Guests are welcome; there is no charge. For more information, call Kerry Krivoshein at (248)524-0227.

CLASSES AND WORKSHOPS

Schoolcraft College: Nancy Lindley will teach the Schoolcraft College class "Raided Roses." "Anyone with at least six hours of sun a day in the summer can grow roses," said Lindley. "You can work around problems like poor soil, but not around the issue of sun light." The five-week class meets 6-9 p.m. beginning Monday, March 11. Lindley will help backyard gardeners recognize the main rose categories, and teach them how to select, fertilize, prune, train and winter protect the plants and produce glorious blooms in the spring and summer. The class will culminate with a visit to a rose garden on April 14. The fee for the class is \$98. For more information or to register, contact the Schoolcraft College Continuing Education Services department at (734) 462-4448. Schoolcraft College is at 18600 Haggerty Road, between Six and Seven Mile roads, just west of 1275 in Livonia.

PETS OF THE WEEK

Dog of the Week: Jake is an adorable and extremely friendly 2-year-old Siberian Husky/Border Collie male mix. A rescuer found the frightened boy trying to cross busy traffic. This handsome and smart loving dog has very expressive, sweet blue eyes. As part Border Collie, he's very friendly and is a natural-born herder who will watch after children and other pets. Since he gets very excited when he's given affection, he might do best living in a home with older children. He's already neutered, vaccinated and very housebroken and would rather be in a good home instead of a cage at the shelter. To give this loving dog a second chance in life please call Michigan Humane Society Westland Shelter, (734) 721-7300.



Cat of the Week: Sunrise is a 6-year-old Domestic Shorthair female with a terrific personality. This gentle cat has a fabulous white coat with black and tan calico markings. She loves to be held and cuddled. Sunrise needs a home with gentle owners as her life in the past hasn't been easy - she deserves a family who will give her lots of affection. Because she is already spayed, vaccinated, and litterbox trained, she is able to go to a new home today! To bring Sunrise home, visit the Michigan Humane Society Rochester Hills Shelter, (248) 852-7420.



Wiring networks connect entire house

(NAPSA) - A growing number of homebuyers are taking a step into the future with a new kind of network. While computer networks are becoming increasingly common, the latest kind of network connects an entire house.

Today a whole new field of residential connectivity products is emerging under the umbrella of structured wiring, which provides the convenience of basic whole-house distribution of voice, data, and video with options to add more functions later on.

Structured wiring allows literally hundreds of activities to be combined and networked with one integrated wiring system to give homeowners incredible options and flexibility.

Homebuyers who want to take advantage of technology and increase a home's re-sale value in the future should consider structured wiring as an affordable option.

Ten years ago, so-called "home network systems" were expensive, difficult to install and sometimes required special appliances or source equipment. Today structured wiring systems are considered more affordable and do not require any programming or systems integrator for installation.

The current wave of interest in this approach is sparked by both the Internet and a number of technological developments.

"Today's homeowners want new homes to be able to connect to high-speed Internet gateways, power home entertainment systems, carry signals to lighting control, home security and other systems and network all these systems together," said Joanne Edwards, Director, Residential Marketing of Square D, a leader in residential electrical equipment.

Said Edwards, "To meet the growing demand for technology, new homes need to have the infrastructure to deliver high-speed connectivity and networking."

For example, the Multi-Link Structured Wiring System from Square D offers whole-house infrared remote control. This allows consumers to watch the master bedroom TV set and, with a universal remote, be able to view and operate any piece of video equipment located in the family room media center.

Additional uses, such as multi-room audio, closed circuit TV-to-consumers can see who's at the front door or check on the baby from any TV set-and security components can be added through an open architecture that accommodates other manufacturer's structured wiring components.

A standard upgrade would include voice, data and video capabilities. Premium upgrades would include add-ons for audio, closed circuit TV, or home automation.

To learn more, visit the Web site at www.square.com/multilink.

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